

Hello listeners; you might say that Peter was a man who paid close attention to the calendar. He didn't have his eye on the calendar of any particular year; he had his eye on God's calendar, on God's timetable. Because he had a day circled in red, you might say, an event that he wanted to make sure God's people were ready for. And that was the day when Christ would return.

Peter's not making any predictions here, in the sense of saying, Christ is going to come back in one year, or ten years, on such and such a date. He's saying, You need to think about what time it is on God's calendar, on God's timetable. And the reason why we've come to this point on God's calendar is because Jesus Christ has done everything that God sent Him to do, to save God's people. He's paid for our sin with His death on the cross; He's risen from the dead; He's ascended into heaven, and right now, He's sitting at the right hand of God, waiting until God has put all things under His feet. There's only one thing left on the list of things that has to happen: Christ has to come again, and, bring an end to all things.

In fact, Jesus has told us that He's on His way. He says in Revelation 1, I am coming soon. And Peter says, As we live from day to day, our whole focus should be on getting ready to meet Him. That's what makes your work and family and marriage, and how you live with the people around you from day to day, so extremely important. Peter wants us to look forward to that day. The word that he uses here for "the end", doesn't just mean, the end; it means, the goal, the purpose, the destination. In other words, that's the goal toward which God is bringing this world, and your life: the day when Jesus Christ comes again.

Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded, for the sake of your prayers. Peter is saying, Since you know that that day is coming closer all the time, don't let yourself be distracted. Be self-controlled. This is one of those instructions that comes back again and again in the Bible: be self-controlled. That's harder than you think. We don't really know what we're up against. Because sin is deceitful. And so self-control is hard. You can't just go wherever the road of life leads you, without thinking about where it's leading you; you can't just do whatever you feel like doing, without thinking about why. Because you can't trust yourself. This is where going the right way starts: with self-control. Watch where you're going; you need to be ready and able to say, No, to what you want, and Yes, to what God wants.

And be sober minded. The world is a place of chaos. A lot of people aren't thinking very straight. They don't know, and they don't want to know, what time it is, or what life is all about. So they don't have no way of recognizing what's important. But you do. So don't let the world distract you. Have your priorities straight. Think about where your life is going; think about how you're spending your time; think about what you really want to invest your life in. Those are excellent qualities in themselves: being self-controlled, and sober-minded. But Peter says, the reason why you need to be self-controlled and sober-minded is so that you can pray. Peter's talking about the habit, or the pattern, or the practice of regular prayer.

And he puts prayer first on the list of our priorities. Because that's the only way we're going to be able to live

the way you should, so that we're ready when the Lord Jesus comes.

This is what the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, in Luke 21, when He was talking to them about being ready for the day when He would come: Don't get distracted. Don't lose sight of the goal. Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

We can pray without thinking. We can pray memorized words as part of a whole spiritual routine. But that's not real prayer. Real prayer is openness before the Lord. It's what we might call, spiritual awareness and honesty. You're aware of the Lord; you're aware of what's going on in your own heart; you're honest about your sins and your weaknesses. A life of prayer is living in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, and in complete dependence on the Lord. And that keeps you from getting caught up in the priorities, and the anxieties that people are all wrapped up in, food and drink and clothing and fun and money.

The opposite is also true. If you're just going through the motions, if you're not pouring out your heart before the Lord, you become less and less aware of Him; He becomes less and less real for you. You get less and less comfort from His promises, and less and less interest in His Word and in His purposes.

In other words, we can't live the Christian life, unless we pray. Unless we're honest with God and with ourselves, and we keep on asking God for help. Because it's hard work to live the Christian life. Listen to how Peter describes the hard work of the Christian life: Above all, keep loving each other earnestly, since love covers over a multitude of sins.

The word that we have translated as "earnestly", literally means, outstretched. Maybe we could say, Love one another intensely, or, constantly. Once more, the Bible makes clear that love isn't just a feeling. It's a commitment; it's a promise that we make to each other. When we say, I love you, that means, I'm going to look out for you. It means, I want the best for you. It means, I'm going to put you and your needs and your happiness, before myself, and what I want. I'm going to be patient with you and your weaknesses; I'm going to treat you with kindness and compassion. I'm going to forgive you, again and again and again.

Peter says, you can't do that by yourself. You need to ask God every day to give you the strength, and the intention, that you will always deal with each other in love.

We need to pay attention to the fact that Peter brings up our sins in this connection. He says, Above all, keep loving each other earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. This is how it is with us. We sin against each other. That's who we are. And so, sadly, that's what we do to each other. We can't live together, not even a single day, without sinning against each other in some way, by acting selfishly, or getting angry, or hurting each other. And we have to deal with that. Or our marriages and your families and our fellowship as Christians are going to suffer, and eventually, come apart.

This is why we need to pray every day that God will give us the strength to love each other. Only the love that

God creates, that God puts into our hearts, His own love, can stand up to our sins. Not because love is blind, as we like to say. It's true that there's something about love that makes us blind to the other person's shortcomings. Everyone can see that person's shortcomings, except the person who loves them.

But that's not what Peter's saying. He's not saying, close your eyes to each other's sins; pretend you didn't see them. What he means is, when it happens, when one of you sins against the other, keep loving each other earnestly. Keep reaching out to each other in love. Because only love covers over a multitude of sins. He doesn't say, Love ignores a multitude of sins. He doesn't say, Love pretends he didn't or she say those things; love acts as if he or she didn't behave that way. Oh, no. Love sees it all. And love knows it all exactly for what it is. Love knows exactly how ugly sin is, and love feels the pain that it causes. What Peter is talking about is what love decides to do about those ugly and hurtful things: it refuses to hold them against the one who sinned. Love chooses to cover them.

Sometimes, that's going to mean, Love chooses to let it go. If it's a small thing, then treat it like a small thing, and forget about it. Don't hold onto it; don't nurse grudges against each other. Don't let it get under your skin, and irritate you. Everyone has the same weaknesses and the same struggles as you do. So there are lots of times you just have to decide to be patient with each other.

But sometimes what the other person does gets between you, because it does more than irritate you; it hurts you, it undermines your trust in him or her. Then you have to love them by doing what Jesus taught us to do in Matthew 18: Go and tell them their fault, between you and them alone. If they won't listen, or repent, then bring some other people in, to act as witnesses, to encourage them to repent. Don't just carry the hurt around; don't let the resentment build up. Work at it, until it's resolved. Until there's repentance, and forgiveness. That's also how love covers a multitude of sins.

There's only one place where we can get that kind of love for each other. We can't depend on our feelings and your emotions. We just don't have the capacity to love each other this way. Contrary to what we might like to think, contrary to what we're told so often, the source of love isn't inside us, in some kind of reservoir that we have to just draw on. Love is the work, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It doesn't just sort of come to you, all by itself, like it was magic or something. You can't just will yourself to love anybody else this way. You have to ask God to give it to you.

And you know what? He will. That's what Jesus promised us. He said, I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! Ask, and seek, and knock, and God will give you the Holy Spirit. And He will give you a love for others will cover a multitude of sins. Thank you for listening –